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The Design of Cross-Cultural Training for Military Advisors

by

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Prefatory Note

This paper was prepared in conjunction with HumRRO Work Unit MAP and was presented at the 1966 American Psychological Association Convention as part of a Symposium session titled, "Training for Cross-Cultural Interaction." Other presentations included the Symposium were as follows: "The American Military Advisor Overseas: His Roles and Responsibilities," by Dr. Melvin T. Snyder; "An Approach to Cultural Self-Awareness," by Dr. Edward C. Stewart and Mr. John B. Pryle; "Practice and Feedback Variables in the Training of Cross-Cultural Interaction Skills," by LT Herbert T. Eachus; and "Criteria of Effectiveness in Overseas Performance," by Dr. Paul Spector.

The Design of Cross-Cultural Training for Military Advisors

Arthur J. Hoehn

Introduction

This paper deals with the design of training for military advisors, with particular attention to the objectives toward which the training should be directed and the kinds of content coverage which is needed.

The term "military advisor" will be used to refer to military personnel assigned overseas with MAAG's, Missions, and Mobile Training Teams performing functions which require close working relationships with military counterparts in the developing nations.

Special difficulties faced by personnel in such assignments are at least three-fold:

1. The physical and cultural context. Climatic conditions are likely to be enervating; economic, social and political conditions, disturbing; communication and understanding of host nationals, difficult. Advisors located in isolated places are particularly likely to experience "culture shock," defined by Oberg (1) as "the anxiety that results from losing all...familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse."

2. The unfamiliar roles to be performed.¹ The functions which the advisor should perform are quite different from those commonly called for within the U.S. military. The mission of advisors is not to perform the work of the host military, nor is it restricted to providing technical expertise. Rather, the job is to induce development and improved performance capability on the part of the host military organization and its personnel. In pursuit of these objectives the advisor will be involved in providing assistance in the planning and building of new organizational structures, the development of human resources, and the development of those capabilities and values which are commonly referred to as "professionalism."

3. The contrasts and complexities of the two interacting systems (U.S. and host country). Much of what occurs in the interactions between advisors and counterparts--the communications problems encountered, the differences in priorities given to various goals and methods, and the outcomes of the interactions--are a function of the similarities and differences of the cultures within which the advisor and

¹ This statement on the roles of the military advisor is drawn from a report being prepared by Dr. Alfred J. Kraemer on job requirements for advisors in civic action program development.

counterpart have been socialized, educated, and trained. At another level of analysis, the advisor and counterpart operate within two different organizational and institutional frameworks. What each can do or will do reflects in large part the policies, plans, methods, and standards of the institutions and organizations which they respectively represent and which have influence or authority over them.

Possible Content for Expanded Training for Military Advisors

The special problems and frustrations now commonly encountered by advisors appear to be such that they can, at least in part, be dealt with through expanded and improved training. Starting with this assumption, it is reasonable to consider the kinds of training objectives and content which might usefully be encompassed in more thorough and adequate preparation for advisory assignments.

Current advisor training focuses primarily on the acquisition of language skills and the learning of a considerable body of information. The information topics touch primarily on the social institutions, history, politics, economics, and geography of the host country, and on the objectives, organizational structure, policies, and procedures associated with the conduct of the U.S. Military Assistance Program in the host country. Types of information which should be given more serious consideration in an expanded training program include: (1) the host military--how it is organized, ways in which it exhibits or fails to exhibit professionalism, and how it is manned and trained; (2) the counterparts--their attitudes, motivations, and work habits; and (3), especially important, systematic information concerning the interactions which have previously taken place between counterparts and advisors in the host country--the kinds of problems and issues which have arisen in the interactions, approaches which have been employed to meet these problems, and the results of the methods.

Preparation for a military advisor assignment frequently includes a lengthy period of training in the audiolingual skills of the host country language. Intensive language training is often given for a period of as long as six to twelve months. However, as Bailey (2) points out, the role of language tends to be based on the concept of the advisor's role as that of engaging in "verbal informational exchanges" rather than of influencing behavior. Also, as Nostrand (3) observes, language instruction is too little concerned with the objectives of developing understanding and regard for another culture.

Most advisor training is directed to a particular country or culture. Appropriate expansion in advisor training should probably include not only country--or culture--specific information, but also provision for teaching conceptual frameworks that have generality across cultures, and that provide general schemas in terms of which the advisor can structure his information and observations and by reference to

which he can organize his thinking and planning as he goes about his job in the cross-cultural setting.

Several available types of conceptual frameworks are relevant:

One consists of culture and social system concepts; an example is the theory of culture described by Hall (4) in his book *The Silent Language*.

A second is represented by the schemas which have been developed for comparing differing cultures; this type is illustrated in the work of Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (5), and its potential utility for training is demonstrated in the work of Stewart (6). This type of schema should help to foster understanding of one's own culture as well as an ability to understand other cultures.

A third important kind of schema covers the cross-cultural innovation process, and is exemplified by a conceptualization presented by Niehoff and Anderson (7).

A fourth kind of conceptual framework which could be of assistance to the advisor is to be found in the generalized models of public administration in the developing nations, an excellent example of this being the "prismatic model" of Riggs (8), a model which relates administrative behavior to ecological conditions typical of transitional societies.

While the study of conceptual frameworks, the learning of a considerable body of job-relevant information, and the acquisition of linguistic skills can be significant components of advisor preparation, they do not, taken by themselves, provide an adequate training program. An advisor may have a command of linguistic skills but not know what to say. Information and conceptual frameworks do not translate directly into decisions and into communication acts. It has become increasingly clear that advisor training, to have any major payoff, must be directed toward the learning of decision-making skills and cross-cultural interaction skills, including, of course, the understandings and sensitivities, perceptions and attitudes, methods and strategies which are necessary supports to these high-order skills.

The necessary interaction skills are essentially skills in human relations in situations where sharp cultural differences are prominent sources of difficulty in communication. Foster and Danielian (9) have reviewed the rationale and approaches for human relations training, including T-group, role playing, and case study methods, and have suggested many ways in which these techniques can be adapted and applied in preparing personnel for overseas work. Some of the human relations training goals which are considered relevant to advisor performance include self-insight, sensitivity to factors influencing interpersonal relationships, increased flexibility, and understanding of interpersonal communication processes.

The decisions which advisors must make require considerations of technical and organizational factors as well

as human relations considerations. The training in decision-making where technical and organizational factors are salient could be greatly improved through use of carefully designed case studies and management simulations, requiring the prospective advisor to make decisions and solve problems similar to those with which he would be faced in the overseas performance setting. These exercises or simulations would be similar to the tactical exercises often utilized by the military. There would not be one grand, all-encompassing exercise, but a whole series of games or simulations, some focusing on one limited set of variables, some on another, and building up in complexity in accordance with a carefully drawn plan.

A Broader Training Perspective

There is a tendency to think of advisor preparation in terms of what happens during the few weeks just prior to the advisor's departure for his assignment. Adequate preparation requires a much broader perspective of the training problem.

The changing nature of conflict requires that military personnel, whether in advisory or other roles, have greater capability in cross-cultural communication. If this is accepted, then there is ample justification for increased emphasis on the development of cross-cultural knowledges and skills and for initiating area training very early in a man's military career rather than withholding it until he has been selected for assignment as an advisor in some particular country.

Some of the cross-cultural skills and knowledges which should be learned by all military personnel, or at least all officer personnel, have generalized applicability across a number of military roles and various cultural settings. These generalized skills and knowledges, such as conceptual frameworks and human relations skills for working with people of other cultures, require a considerable amount of training time. Certainly, if they are to be taught at all, they must be taught long before the usual short preassignment training period. An intensive short course given just prior to departure for a specific assignment can then focus on more specific information and practice of specific communication behaviors.

In-country training can also be important. Observers have stated that technical assistance and military advisor personnel are particularly receptive to further training after they have been in their assignments for a period of about three months. Possible prototypes for in-country training are found in the exploratory effort of Hausman and Kolmer (10) in Viet Nam, and in the approach developed by Humphrey (11) and currently being evaluated in Korea.

Just because a man has served as an advisor in one kind of role in one country does not mean that he is entirely prepared to serve in a different advisory role or in another country. Montgomery (12) refers to "transfer errors"--errors due to

difficulties in discriminating between the relevant and the misleading as the advisor transfers from one overseas assignment to another. Training between assignments can help avoid this source of error as well as provide additional country- and job-specific information.

It is recognized that training to prepare personnel for effective cross-cultural interaction must compete for priority with many other components of military training. While moves toward greater attention to area training are evident, there is considerable uncertainty as to how far this trend will go. Perhaps for the immediate future one of the most promising approaches to major expansion in training for cross-cultural interaction would be that of revamping lengthy, intensive language training programs so that they become programs of training in cross-cultural communication or interaction. Nostrand (3) has attempted to define the desired behavioral outcomes of such training and has suggested ways in which social-cultural material can be built into language courses. Language courses transformed in accordance with Nostrand's suggestions would not provide a satisfactory substitute for the kinds of interpersonal interaction and decision-making training which I have described earlier, but they would represent a significant forward step.

Summary

Factors which make the advisor's assignment quite different from typical military assignments include the unusual physical and cultural setting, the unfamiliar functions to be performed, and the complex intercultural, international, interorganizational, and interpersonal aspects of the job. Adequate preparation requires high-order knowledges and skills which can be developed only by adoption of new perspectives for area training. These new perspectives relate not only to objectives and content but also to the overall plan for programing area training into the larger pattern of education and training spanning the military officer's career.

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